

SSUDAC Meeting Summary
April 18, 2013

Members Present: Ernest Bland, Carmen Camacho, Jessica Evans, Don Hague, Ed Levy, Jon Lourie, Yuri van Mierlo, Melvin Tull

Members Absent: Dan Figueroa

Call to Order and Introductions:

- Mr. Ernest Bland, Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:36 p.m. He noted that Elza Hisel-McCoy of Park & Planning was scheduled to attend the meeting for a follow-up conversation regarding zoning, but had to cancel.

Reports:

Police Briefing & Crime Report

Lt. Elizabeth Hattenburg, 3rd Police Precinct

- Lt. Hattenburg reported a recent accident which occurred at East-West Highway and Georgia Ave., involving a motorist that lost control of her car near the construction site at that location. The motorist sustained minor injuries. She and her two children were taken to the hospital as a precaution.
- Lt. Hattenburg mentioned the recent Boston Marathon bombings, noting that police had increased staff and patrols in the Silver Spring Metro station area on Monday and Tuesday. Police also dispatched five bomb dogs countywide, with a focus on the Rockville Pike's Peak race on Saturday. Lt. Hattenburg noted that there had been a suspicious box reported to police on Monday night. The bomb unit was dispatched, the box was tested and found to be harmless.
- Lt. Hattenburg reported that with the warmer weather, more of the homeless are out on the streets, as Progress Place, the CBD's homeless shelter, has discontinued its extended winter hours. Lt. Hattenburg noted that the police bike unit has been working with the Urban District's Red Shirt team to move homeless citizens along and out of public use areas. Yvette Freeman mentioned that the SSUD is also working directly with Community Vision, Progress Place and the County's Department of Health & Human Services.
- Lt. Hattenburg discussed the relocation of Progress Place to a new building, reporting that April 2014 was the projected groundbreaking date, with April 2015 being the projected opening date presuming no setbacks in construction.

- Lt. Hattenburg also reported on two sexual assaults, one a false report and the other an ongoing investigation. Two arrests have been made in the second case.
- Committee member Mel Tull asked about the police department's Pedestrian Safety Awareness Week, mentioned at last month's committee meeting. Lt. Hattenburg stated that the Special Operations Division is working their way through the County but has not yet gotten to Silver Spring to begin ticketing motorists and pedestrians in violation of traffic laws.
- Following a complaint from local property manager Paul Nazelrod, a broader discussion concerning the homeless citizens in downtown Silver Spring ensued. Committee members spoke to the dual aspects of the issue - working to help the homeless move off of the streets and into permanent housing, as well as dealing with drunk and disorderly conduct and other illegal activities. The problem, while more visible during the warmer months, is a year-round issue and the committee felt strongly that working to eliminate the source of the issue should be the focus of any action taken, rather than temporary steps such as working to keep Progress Place open during construction of their new site. Committee Chair Ernest Bland mentioned that he would raise the issue with the County Executive in an upcoming meeting.

New Business

- Mr. Bland moved to accept the March 21st meeting summary (for the record) with one minor edit to the Call to Order and Introduction sections. Mel Tull seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.
- Mr. Tony Hausner also made a brief announcement regarding Safe Silver Spring's upcoming Gun Safety Act events, including a concert on April 28th and a forum with state officials on May 6th.
- Mr. Bland also noted that he and committee members Mel Tull and Jon Lourie, along with Reemberto Rodriguez, had attended a meeting last evening regarding the Silver Spring Transit Center and its delays and setbacks. Yvette Freeman also attended the meeting.

Urban District Report

Ms. Yvette Freeman, Chief of Operations, Silver Spring Urban District

Ms. Freeman presented the Silver Spring Urban District report:

- In January, Ms. Freeman and Mr. Rodriguez attended a meeting hosted by Valerie Ervin and DC councilwoman Muriel Bowser addressing traffic safety issues in the 16th St. circle area, including poor visibility and sight lines. Ms. Freeman reported that at her request landscaping work was recently completed by Ruppert Landscape at the 16th St. Circle. The

work enhanced sight lines for safety and also offered an aesthetic improvement.

- Ms. Freeman reported that she has been meeting monthly with the members involved with the County's I.O.S. (Interim Operations Site). The group discussed the challenges associated with the delayed Transit Center opening. Ms. Freeman emphasized to the group that many of the streets and sidewalks in the I.O.S. area are in poor condition and in need of serious repair. Detailed photos (66) and information have been forwarded to Don Scheuerman in the Department of General Services for review.
- Ms. Freeman mentioned that a food vendor had been operating near the entrance of the Silver Spring Metro station. Despite having been issued a permit, Ms. Freeman said she felt that vendors should not be located in this area given congestion and other safety issues.
- Ms. Freeman noted that the Urban District is committed to working to improve the homelessness issue in the downtown area. She asked that folks utilize the SSUD Hotline number (240-876-2911) to make reports.

Silver Spring Regional Area Director's Report

Mr. Reemberto Rodriguez, Silver Spring Regional Center

- Mr. Rodriguez presented his report, mentioning the recent opening of La Madeline at Georgia Ave. & Wayne Ave., as well as the new pedestrian crosswalk on Wayne Ave. between Georgia Ave. & Fenton St.
- The Arts & Entertainment Advisory Committee has received a grant for a three minute downtown Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment video. The video will emphasize the growing number of places in Silver Spring to listen to live music.
- Mr. Rodriguez emphasized the large number of events occurring this year, noting a general increase over the last two years, due in part to the opening of the Fillmore and the overall increase in area restaurants.
- Committee member Mel Tull asked about the State Highway Administration's (SHA) work in the Montgomery Hills area, specifically the Georgia Ave. reconstruction between Forest Glen and 16th St., and whether it would impact the existing businesses in the area. Mr. Rodriguez stated that SHA's number one priority is to increase safety in the area, rather than improving traffic flow, and that the overall positive or negative impact of the reconstruction on local businesses is still unknown. Committee Chair Ernest Bland mentioned that he would like SHA to report on the Montgomery Hills reconstruction at a future meeting.
- Mr. Bland reported that the sidewalk outside of City Place Mall along Fenton St. is in poor condition and represents a safety hazard.

The Blairs Presentation

Bill Kominers & Ed Murn, The Blairs

Representatives from The Blairs presented an overview of the 20-year plan to redevelop the existing Blairs property enclosed by East-West Highway, Colesville Rd., Eastern Ave., 16th St., and Blair Mill Rd. The goal of the redevelopment is to modernize the property layout, with a focus on turning the inwardly designed suburban space into a more outwardly focused public space, adding more public green spaces, as well as improving sustainability in the residential buildings. The redesign will also improve traffic and pedestrian flow in the area.

- The project plan was filed with the planning board on March 26th, 2013 and is currently in the review process. Project representatives are set to present to the planning board in September.
- The redevelopment would occur in distinct phases in order to minimize the impact and disruption to area residents. The first phase would include the demolition of the four oldest residential buildings within the area and is tentatively planned for 2014. The developers estimate that each phase will take between 2.5 and 3 years, with a total of 7 phases of demolition and new construction.
- The new development would mainly contain residential buildings, with some mixed use residential & retail zones. Other non-residential buildings proposed for the site are an office building and a hotel.
- The current Giant grocery store would stay open during the redevelopment process until their new building could be constructed. Committee member Ed Levy asked if other retailers within the redevelopment zone had been contacted. Mr. Murn responded that they have made retailers aware of the redevelopment plans but have not had specific discussions with any of them.
- The new redevelopment would include 4.1 acres of open green space, not counting rooftop garden amenities at residential buildings. Also included in this green space are plans for a large public park, specifically designed for outdoor events. Other proposed amenities include private and public dog parks, a fitness park, and rooftop courtyards.
- Committee members raised various concerns, including questions regarding the ownership of the Exxon gas station on the corner of East-West Highway and Colesville Rd. and how it could fit into the redevelopment plan if acquired. Also discussed was how long it would take to have the Giant grocery store established in its new building, and concerns about the capacity of nearby roads considering the increased traffic flow.

- All residents within the buildings set to be demolished have been encouraged to move to other units within the Blairs. Staff members have been working directly with residents to ease the relocation process, including waiving lease restrictions and allowing a 12 month period in which to move. Residents choosing to move to residences outside of The Blairs have been allowed to break their leases with no penalties.
- Committee member Mel Tull proposed a motion to write a letter of recommendation for the project to the County Executive and County Council. Carmen Camacho seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:37 p.m.